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## Fetish

Orlando Ricardo Menes

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Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry  
Editor Kwame Dawes

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# Fetish: Poems

Orlando Ricardo Menes

University of Nebraska Press | Lincoln and London

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Set in Arno Pro by Laura Wellington.

Designed by J. Vadnais.

for my wife Ivis and  
our two children,  
Valerie and Adrian



From my North of cold whistled in a sepulchral South,  
Her South of pine and coral and coralline sea,  
Her home, not mine, in the ever-freshened Keys . . . .  
—Wallace Stevens, “Farewell to Florida”

In dusk, as though this island lifted, floated  
In Indian baths . . .  
—Hart Crane, “Island Quarry”





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*Callaloo*: “Fetish”

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*The Cincinnati Review*: “Golgotha” and “Libros”

*Crab Orchard Review*: “Sal” and “Aubade: The Charcoal Makers”

*The Evansville Review*: “Tantrums”

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*Shenandoah*: “Ars Poetica” and “Mole”

*Tar River Poetry*: “Pyx” and “Adderall”

*West Branch*: “Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill”; “Tía Gladys, Backroom Seamstress”; and “Windfall Antiques”

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# Fetish

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# 1. Ars Poetica

Ay, venga, paloma, venga  
y cuénteme usted su pena.  
—Nicolás Guillén, “Balada”

O come, dove, come  
and tell me your sorrows.  
“Ballad”





## Courtyard of Clotheslines, Angel Hill

Though dark clouds hint the kind of rain  
that strafes a city, the long drought has made  
fresh water scarce as milk or gasoline.  
Sand like raw sugar blows from Gabon,  
burying creek and aqueduct alike,  
even agaves wither in tin-can gardens,  
and the women of Angel Hill make do  
with shortages more numerous than bristles  
on a pig. No meat today? They grind  
plantain peels or pickle mop rags. No soap?  
They churn clothes in boiled seawater,  
rig sisal lines to iron balconies that crisscross  
the stone courtyard like a cat's cradle,  
and because Havana Bay is so close,  
wayward gusts wreck the frazzled rope—  
a darned diaper or threadbare blouse  
tossed like some injured bird astray  
in cumuli that scud Caribbean shores.  
While clothes can be replaced by barter  
or theft, those kin lost at sea are grieved  
in shrines of patched photos, wild flowers,  
the clay and cowrie-eyed Elegua, “way opener,”  
mollified by rum-soaked tobacco,  
these desperate men and women, called *escoria*,  
scum, by the government, who take

to the Florida Straits on rafts stitched  
from boards, wire mesh, inner tubes,  
whose hasty provisions fall overboard  
in the high swells, who clamor to María  
or Yemayá for sweet water, calm seas,  
dry land, then plunge into the waves  
when angels whisper from the brine.